DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 106 890 CS 501 071

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TITLE Audience Response to Speech Analysis Following Televised Political Messages.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Chicago, April, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Audiences; Behavior Patterns; Communication (Thought Transfer); *Credibility; *Editorials; Higher Education; Political Issues; *Public Opinion; *Television Research
IDENTIFIERS *Instant Analysis

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to test the effects of speech analysis (television commentary) on audience responses to televised political speeches. Six hypotheses on the so-called instant analysis phenomenon were tested. Subjects for the study were 115 adults drawn from the Fort Collins, Colorado, community. While it was concluded that instant analysis apparently influences audience response, the precise effects of credibility and commentary type remain ambiguous. (RB)

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AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO SPEECH ANALYSIS FOLLOWING TELEVISED POLITICAL MESSAGES

This research was designed to experimentally test the effects of speech analysis (TV commentary) upon audience responses to televised political speeches. This experiment specifically tested the effects of reinforcement and rebuttal commentary and high and low credibility commentary upon audience recall and attitude change. Adult community members were used as subjects.

Presented to the International Communication Association
Annual Conference
Mass Communication Division
Chicago, Ill., April 1975

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AUDIENCE RESPONSE TO SPEECH ANALYSIS FOLLOWING TELEVISED POLITICAL MESSAGES[1]

In November, 1969, Vice-President Spiro T. Agnew criticized the broadcasting industry for "instant analysis" of televised Presidential addresses. Agnew was particularly disturbed about commentator opinion as it influences audience response to political messages. Subsequent to Agnew's criticism, major network adjustments were made in approaches to speech criticism and analysis of televised political addresses. However, decisions to modify or ban "instant analysis" were made without the aid of any empirical data. Networks undertook no major research to determine the effects of speech analysis on the television audience. To date little empirical data exists to aid our understanding of the impact of "instant analysis."[2] The philosophical controversy continues in the broadcasting industry and in political circles.

This research tested the effects of the so-called "instant analysis" phenomenon. Specifically, we tested the effects of reinforcement and rebuttal commentary and high and low credibility commentary on audience attitude change and recall of information.

METHODOLOGY:

Research Hypotheses

1. Television commentary following a televised speech will influence the attitudes of the viewers.
2. Commentator credibility will influence attitude shift.
3. Type of commentary will influence attitude shift.
4. Greater retention of speech material (arguments, evidence, facts) will be demonstrated by groups hearing both speech and commentary.
5. Commentator credibility will influence the amount of speech material retained by viewers.
6. Type of commentary will influence the amount of speech material retained by viewers.

Sample

Subjects for this research were 115 adults drawn from the Fort Collins, Colorado,community. Local civic, fraternal, social, and professional organizations participated in the study.

Procedure

A televised speech and commentary conditions were produced by the Colorado State University Educational Media Office. A political message dealing with the energy crisis was adapted from an actual address given by an Exxon Oil executive and presented by local talent under conditions approximating commercial TV speech coverage. Rebuttal commentary of high and low credibility and reinforcing commentary of high and low credibility were scripted and recorded on color video tape under conditions approximating commercial TV "instant analysis."[3]

The entire program of speech coverage and commentary was attributed to a Detroit area TV station. A panel of experts viewed the programs (all conditions) and agreed in their judgments that: (a) the program realistically represented major TV speech coverage and commentary conditions; and (b) the various commentary conditions were operationalized as claimed by the experimenters. An earlier study has confirmed[4] that the credibility manipulations were operating as designed.

Subjects' attitudes were pretested three to four weeks before viewing of the programs. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of five groups: Speech only; Speech followed by reinforcing commentary of high credibility; Speech followed by reinforcing commentary of low credibility; Speech followed by rebuttal commentary of low credibility; Speech followed by rebuttal commentary of high credibility. After viewing the program, subjects were administered post attitude questionnaires and a recall test on information from the speech.[5]

RESULTS:

Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were tested by comparing the posttest attitudes of viewers for the different conditions. Table 1 presents the mean and adjusted[6] mean attitude scores of the subjects in the respective conditions. The results of analysis of covariance of the data in Table 1 are summarized in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that television commentary following a televised speech would influence the attitudes of viewers. Our results provided support for this hypothesis.

Table 2 summarizes the results of analysis of covariance and treatment contrasts. The results indicate a significant difference ($p<.01$) over all conditions indicating support for hypothesis 1. In direct support of the hypothesis, further analysis reveals that the speech only group X experimental groups comparisons is significantly different ($p<.001$). However, the speech only group is the major group wherein subjects' attitudes are actually shifting from pretest to posttest. While the statistical results reveal a significant influence of commentary, the reinforcement and rebuttal purposes of commentary apparently did not influence attitudes in logically predicted directions.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that commentator credibility would influence attitude shift. Hypothesis 2 was supported by the high X low credibility comparisons ($p<.01$). For both commentary types, high credibility commentators generated attitudes significantly less favorable to the speech than did low credibility commentators.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the type of commentary would influence attitude shift. Comparison of the commentary factors revealed no significant difference ($F<1$), forcing rejection of the experimental hypothesis. Further, comparison for the interactive

effect between credibility and type of commentary revealed no significant interaction (F=1.3).

Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 were tested by comparing recall scores of viewers for the different conditions. Table 3 presents the mean recall scores of the subjects in the different treatment groups. The results of analysis of variance of the data in Table 3 are summarized in Table 4.

Hypothesis 4 predicted greater retention of speech material by groups hearing both speech and commentary. Based on one-way analysis of variance, hypothesis 4 is rejected (F=1.346, nS). The speech only group X commentary groups comparisons also failed to reveal significance (F<1). Commentary failed to enhance recall of speech material even though each commentary condition included a restatement of information from the speech that was later measured on a recall test.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that commentator credibility would influence the amount of speech material retained by viewers. A significant difference ($p<.05$) was found between recall of those groups exposed to high credibility commentary as opposed to those exposed to low credibility commentary. The difference attributed to credibility factors provides support for hypothesis 5. The mean recall scores for high credibility groups was significantly lower than those for low credibility groups.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that the type of commentary would influence the amount of speech material retained by viewers. As indicated in Table 4, no significant difference was revealed when the reinforcement and rebuttal factors were compared. Thus hypothesis 6 must be rejected. In addition the interaction effects of commentary types and credibility reveal nonsignificance.

DISCUSSION:

The results of this study suggest that Spiro Agnew may have been correct -- instant analysis of televised political messages does apparently influence audience response. At this time the complex dimensions of this influence are not completely understood. Data analysis suggests that audiences watching any form of commentary react differently than audiences exposed to only a televised speech. However, the precise effects of credibility and commentary type remain somewhat ambiguous. For instance, although credibility (high vs. low) tests out significantly different in accounting for audience variance, the directions of the effects are not always as expected. Additionally, we found no significant interaction between credibility and commentary and no significant effects attributable to commentary type alone (reinforcement vs. rebuttal).

Adequate clarification of the effects of television speech commentary may await further data and study. The authors have the subjects' ratings of credibility for the speaker and commentator in all conditions. Analysis of this data may help clarify the results. Additionally, the authors plan to follow up this study by interviewing selected subjects about their feelings toward the "treatment condition" in hopes of uncovering how subjects viewed the situation. Lastly, further research using different topics and subjects will hopefully help piece the instant analysis puzzle together.

TABLE 1

Analysis of Covariance
Mean Attitude Scores and Adjusted Means

Groups	n	Pretest	Posttest	Adjusted Posttest
Speech Only	23	26.51	21.70	22.90
Speech + Hi Cred. Reinf.	23	29.00	30.35	29.92
Speech + Hi Cred. Rebut.	23	27.83	30.48	30.85
Speech + Lo Cred. Reinf.	23	29.39	28.52	27.83
Speech + Lo Cred. Rebut.	23	29.04	26.48	26.02

TABLE 2

Summary Table
One Way Analysis of Covariance

Source	df	ms	F	p
Treatment	4	231.88	6.995	.001
Speech x Commentary	1	607.60	18.33	.001
Credibility	1	275.98	8.32	.01
Commentary	1	4.37	<1	ns
Cred. x Commentary	1	43.10	1.3	ns
Error	109	33.15		

TABLE 3

Mean Recall Scores

Groups	$\bar{m}$	sd
Speech Only	6.1	1.7
Speech + Hi Cred. Reinf.	5.6	2.1
Speech + Hi Cred. Rebut.	5.3	2.1
Speech + Lo Cred. Reinf.	6.2	1.2
Speech + Lo Cred. Rebut.	6.2	1.3

TABLE 4

One Way Analysis of Variance

Recall Scores

Source	df	ms	F	p
Treatment	4	4.02	1.345	ns
Speech x Commentary	1	1.36	< 1	ns
Credibility	1	13.32	4.45	.05
Commentary	1	0.53	< 1	ns
Cred. x Commentary	1	0.88	< 1	ns
Error	110	2.991		

ENDNOTES

1. This project was supported in part by a Colorado State University Faculty Research Grant.

2. The major television networks, the Federal Communications Commission, and current mass communication bibliographies all indicate that no research has been conducted on the "instant analysis" phenomenon. One study, "Audience Response to Instant Analysis of Television Speeches," was conducted by Lynn Collins, (Colorado State University Department of Speech) which examined the effects of speech commentary using subjects from basic speech courses.

3. Commentator credibility was manipulated through introductions and internal cues. Introductions revealed the high credibility source as well informed and experienced in investigating the energy crisis; the low credibility source was introduced as a last minute stand-in. Personal references to expertise and experience with the topic characterized material presented by the high credibility source. Delivery was assertive and hard-hitting. Lack of experience with the topic and uncertainty characterized the material presented by the low credibility source. Delivery was weak and hesitant.

4. Lynn Collins, "Audience Response To Instant Analysis of Televised Speeches," M.A. Thesis, Colorado State University (August, 1974), p. 136.

5. Attitude tests consisted of seven issues drawn from the speech, each measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale. Recall was measured using raw scores on a ten-item multiple choice information test about speech content.

6. One-way analysis of variance revealed no significant difference in pretest attitudes among the different groups ($F=0.545$; 4,110 df).